

SPLIT-CAN DIPOLE ANTENNA FOR AN IMPLANTABLE MEDICAL DEVICE

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Cross-Reference to Related Application(s)

This application is a division of U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 09/761,974, filed on January 16, 2001, the specification of which is incorporated herein by reference.

Field of the Invention

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This invention pertains to implantable medical devices such as cardiac pacemakers and implantable cardioverter/defibrillators. In particular, the invention relates to an apparatus and method for enabling radio-frequency telemetry in such devices.

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Background

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Implantable medical devices, including cardiac rhythm management devices such as pacemakers and implantable cardioverter/defibrillators, typically have the capability to communicate data with a device called an external programmer via a radio-frequency telemetry link. A clinician may use such an external programmer to program the operating parameters of an implanted medical device. For example, the pacing mode and other operating characteristics of a pacemaker are typically modified after implantation in this manner. Modern implantable devices also include the capability for bidirectional communication so that information can be transmitted to the programmer from the implanted device. Among the data which may typically be telemetered from an implantable device are various operating parameters and physiological data, the latter either collected in real-time or stored from previous monitoring operations.

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Telemetry systems for implantable medical devices utilize radio-frequency energy to enable bidirectional communication between the implantable device and an external programmer. An exemplary telemetry system for an external programmer and a cardiac pacemaker is described in U.S. Patent No. 4,562,841, issued to Brockway et

al. and assigned to Cardiac Pacemakers, Inc., the disclosure of which is incorporated herein by reference. A radio-frequency carrier is modulated with digital information, typically by amplitude shift keying where the presence or absence of pulses in the signal constitute binary symbols or bits. The external programmer transmits and receives the radio signal with an antenna incorporated into a wand which can be positioned in proximity to the implanted device. The implantable device also generates and receives the radio signal by means of an antenna, typically formed by a wire coil wrapped around the periphery of the inside of the device casing.

In previous telemetry systems, the implantable device and the external programmer communicate by generating and sensing a modulated electromagnetic field in the near-field region with the antennas of the respective devices inductively coupled together. The wand must therefore be in close proximity to the implantable device, typically within a few inches, in order for communications to take place. This requirement is an inconvenience for a clinician and limits the situations in which telemetry can take place.

Summary of the Invention

The present invention is an apparatus and method for enabling communications with an implantable medical device utilizing far-field electromagnetic radiation. Using far-field radiation allows communications over much greater distances than with inductively coupled antennas. In accordance with the invention, separate conductive portions of a housing for the implantable device act as a dipole antenna for radiating and receiving far-field radio-frequency radiation modulated with telemetry data. The antenna is dimensioned such that a substantial portion of the radio-frequency energy delivered to it at a specified frequency by a transmitter in the implantable device is emitted as far-field electromagnetic radiation. A tuning circuit may be used to tune the antenna by optimizing its impedance.

Brief Description of the Drawings

Fig. 1 illustrates one embodiment of a split-can dipole antenna.

Fig. 2 illustrates an alternate embodiment of a split-can dipole antenna with the device header separating the two housing portions.

5 Fig. 3 is a block diagram of the components of an exemplary cardiac rhythm management device.

Detailed Description

As noted above, conventional radio-frequency (RF) telemetry systems used for
10 implantable medical devices such as cardiac pacemakers utilize inductive coupling between the antennas of the implantable device and an external programmer in order to transmit and receive RF signals. Because the induction field produced by a transmitting antenna falls off rapidly with distance, such systems require close proximity between the implantable device and a wand antenna of the external programmer in order to work
15 properly, usually on the order of a few inches. The present invention, on the other hand, is an apparatus and method for enabling telemetry with an implantable medical device utilizing far-field radiation. Communication using far-field radiation can take place over much greater distances which makes it more convenient to use an external programmer. Also, the increased communication range makes possible other
20 applications of the telemetry system such as remote monitoring of patients and communication with other types of external devices.

A time-varying electrical current flowing in an antenna produces a corresponding electromagnetic field configuration that propagates through space in the form of electromagnetic waves. The total field configuration produced by an antenna
25 can be decomposed into a far-field component, where the magnitudes of the electric and magnetic fields vary inversely with distance from the antenna, and a near-field component with field magnitudes varying inversely with higher powers of the distance. The field configuration in the immediate vicinity of the antenna is primarily due to the near-field component, also known as the induction field, while the field configuration at

greater distances is due solely to the far-field component, also known as the radiation field. The near-field is a reactive field in which energy is stored and retrieved but results in no net energy outflow from the antenna unless a load is present in the field, coupled either inductively or capacitively to the antenna. The far-field, on the other hand, is a radiating field that carries energy away from the antenna regardless of the presence of a load in the field. This energy loss appears to a circuit driving the antenna as a resistive impedance which is known as the radiation resistance. If the frequency of the RF energy used to drive an antenna is such that the wavelength of electromagnetic waves propagating therein is much greater than the length of the antenna, a negligible far-field component is produced. In order for a substantial portion of the energy delivered to the antenna to be emitted as far-field radiation, the wavelength of the driving signal should not be very much larger than the length of the antenna.

A dipole antenna is made of two lengths of metal, usually arranged end to end with the cable from a transmitter/receiver feeding each length of the dipole in the middle. An efficiently radiating resonant structure is formed if each length of metal in the dipole is a quarter-wavelength long, so that the combined length of the dipole from end to end is a half-wavelength. A wire antenna for an implantable medical device capable of emitting far-field radiation, however, may require special implantation procedures and may also be broken or deformed as a patient moves resulting in detuning. In accordance with the present invention, a dipole antenna for an implantable medical device is formed by separate conductive portions of the device housing or can, referred to herein as a split-can dipole antenna. In one embodiment, the conductive housing is split into two halves separated by an insulating dielectric material, with each half connected to transmitting/receiving circuitry contained within one of the housing portions. Unlike wire antennas, a split-can dipole antenna does not require any special implantation procedures and is a rigid structure which is resistant to breakage or deformation.

An antenna most efficiently radiates energy if the length of the antenna is an integral number of half-wavelengths of the driving signal. A half-wave dipole antenna,

for example, is a center-driven conductor which has a length equal to half the wavelength of the driving signal. The natural tuning of a split-can dipole antenna depends, of course on the device size. For example, a typical lengthwise dimension of an implantable cardiac rhythm management device may be about 6.8 cm, which corresponds to a half wavelength of a 2.2 GHz carrier frequency. If each half of a split-can dipole antenna is 3.4 cm, then the antenna is a half-wavelength dipole at that carrier frequency. For medical device applications, carrier frequencies between 300 MHz and 1 GHz are most desirable. As will be discussed below, an antenna tuning circuit may be used to alter the effective electrical length of an antenna by loading it with capacitance or inductance. The split-can antenna is especially advantageous in this respect as compared with conventional wire antennas because it is physically wide and possesses a greater bandwidth. An antenna with a greater bandwidth is easier to tune and is usable over a greater range of frequencies once it is tuned. A larger antenna bandwidth also allows a higher data rate and minimizes the risk of losing communications due to frequency drift.

Fig. 1 shows an exemplary implantable medical device 100 with a dipole antenna suitable for radiating and receiving far-field electromagnetic radiation formed by respective halves of the device housing 101a and 101b. The device housing is metallic and contains therapy circuitry TC1 for providing particular functionality to the device such as cardiac rhythm management, physiological monitoring, drug delivery, or neuromuscular stimulation as well as circuitry RFC1 for providing RF communications. One or more therapy leads 310 are connected to the therapy circuitry contained within the housing by means of a header 103 with feedthroughs located therein for routing the therapy leads to the appropriate internal components. The two housing portions 101a and 101b are separated by a layer of insulating material 102. Fig. 2 shows an alternate embodiment in which the header is made of dielectric material and is interposed between the two housing portions 101a and 101b, thus also serving to separate the two legs of the dipole antenna. In either embodiment, the two housing portions 101a and 101b are hermetically sealed with a minimum number of feedthroughs between them. A

battery B1 is used to supply power to the electronic circuitry within the housing. If the battery alone is contained within one of the housing portions, then only two feedthroughs are needed between the two housing portions, one for each battery terminal. Alternatively, the battery and the RF circuitry can be placed in one housing portion, with the rest of the device circuitry contained in the other portion. This shields the sensitive therapy circuitry from the very noisy RF circuitry.

Fig. 3 is a block diagram of an exemplary implantable cardiac rhythm management device utilizing a split-can dipole antenna for radio-frequency telemetry. In the figure, only one therapy lead 310 is shown but it should be understood that a cardiac rhythm management device may use two or more such leads. A microprocessor controller 302 controls the operation of the therapy circuitry 320 which includes sensing and stimulus generation circuitry that are connected to electrodes by the therapy leads for control of heart rhythm and RF drive circuitry 330 for transmitting and receiving a carrier signal at a specified frequency modulated with telemetry data. The conductors of the therapy lead 310 connect to the therapy circuitry 320 through a filter 321 that serves to isolate the circuitry 320 from any RF signals that may be picked up by the lead. The filter 321 may be a low-pass filter or a notch filter such as a choke. The RF drive circuitry 330 includes an RF transmitter and receiver that are connected by a transmit/receive switch 333 to the dipole antenna formed by the housing portions 101a and 101b. The microprocessor 302 outputs and receives the data contained in the modulated carrier generated or received by the drive circuitry 330.

In this embodiment, the RF drive circuitry 330 is connected to the dipole antenna through an antenna tuning circuit which loads the antenna with a variable amount of inductance or capacitance to thereby adjust the effective electrical length of the antenna and match the antenna impedance to the impedance of the transmitter/receiver. In this manner, the reactance of the antenna may be tuned out so that the antenna forms a resonant structure at the specified carrier frequency and efficiently transmits/receives far-field radiation. The tuning circuit in this embodiment includes a balun transformer 400 and a variable capacitor 402 for loading the antenna

with an adjustable amount of reactance. The balun transformer drives the two housing portions 180 degrees out of phase and thus also serves to convert between the single-ended signal generated or received by the transmitter/receiver circuitry and the differential signal generated or received by the antenna. The balun transformer 400 also
5 acts as a high-pass filter which blocks low frequency energy from being passed to the RF circuitry such as may be generated when the housing is used as an electrode in delivering electrostimulation with a monopolar lead.

Although the invention has been described in conjunction with the foregoing specific embodiment, many alternatives, variations, and modifications will be apparent
10 to those of ordinary skill in the art. Such alternatives, variations, and modifications are intended to fall within the scope of the following appended claims.